Dr. WELLS's
LETTER
TO A
FRIEND.

Price Two Pence.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND

Concerning the

Great Sin OF *Taking* GOD's *Name in vain.*

Whereto are added, One or Two Remarks concerning *Vain* or *Common Swearing.*

By *Edward Wells*, D. D. Rector of *Cotesbach* in *Leicestershire.*

The Second Edition.

LONDON,
Printed for *James Knapton*, at the *Crown* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard. 1710.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND,

Concerning the Great Sin of Taking GOD's Name in Vain. *Whereto are added, One or Two Remarks concerning* Vain *or* Common Swearing.

SIR,

THAT regard you already have for Virtue and Piety, makes me have a ſincere Reſpect and Friendſhip for you. And I can't better expreſs the Sincerity of my Friendſhip, than by being ſerviceable to you in a Matter of the greateſt Concern; I mean, the promoting your Piety

to a still higher, and yet but absolutely necessary Degree.

I gladly do you the Justice to say, that I have not observed you to be guilty of transgressing any one of the *Ten Commandments*, (taken in their largest extent, or so as to comprehend under them the Whole of the Christian Religion) but the *Third*; nor even that, but in one respect, viz. *Taking the Name of GOD in Vain*, according to the more proper Acceptation of the Words, *i. e.* in mentioning the Name of GOD or LORD in Common Discourse, without any Need, or upon Trivial Occasions.

I am sorry I must say, that I have observ'd you, more than once, Faulty herein. At the first I mistrusted my own Ears, being willing to think the Fault lay rather in *them*, than in *you*. As soon as it appear'd, where the Fault truly lay, I cou'd not but wonder, that you who in other respects shew so just a Sense of the Honour due to GOD, should seem so little sensible of the Dishonouring GOD in this respect.

The Love I owe both to God and you, made me resolve to admonish you of this your great Sin, after such a manner as should be most likely to be effectual, and consequently to draw up this Paper, and communicate it to you.

To convince you then of the most fatal Mischief you expose your self to, by this single sinful Freedom, I need but apply to you the Argument us'd by St. *James* (Ch. 2. v. 10, 11.) *Whosoever shall keep the Whole Law* as to other Points, *and yet offend in one* Point, *He is* esteemed in the Sight of GOD as *Guilty of* transgressing *All* the Law. *For he that*

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said, Thou shalt have no other Gods but me; said also, Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain. Now, if thou hast no other God but the True God, yet, if you take the Name of God in vain, thou art become, in the Sight of GOD, *a Transgressour of the Law,* i. e. in the meaning of St. *James*, such a Transgressor, as has no Right to Salvation by the Gospel-covenant, till he has particularly repented of this Sin, and actually renounc'd and forsaken it. And herein that other argument us'd by the same Apostle (Ch. 3. v. 10, 12.) in a Case very near akin to yours: *Does a Fountain send forth at the same place sweet Water and bitter? Can the Fig-tree bear Olive-berries? Or a Vine Figs? So can no Fountain both yield salt Water and fresh.*

Hence you may learn, Sir, that *Taking the Name of GOD in vain*, tho' it be the only sinful Freedom I know you guilty of, yet is enough to Marr all your other Acts of Religion and Piety; so to pollute them, as to render them Not-acceptable to GOD, and consequently Not-available to your Salvation. Which is so dreadful a Consideration, that, as I can't use a more Powerful one to convince you of your Dangerous State, so I can't suppose you could ever have suffer'd your self to *Take GOD's Name in vain*, had this Consideration ever came into your Thoughts.

To tell you freely my Sentiments: I look upon it as a Master-piece of Satan, (that grand Enemy to GOD's Glory, and Man's Salvation) to be able so to bring things about, as that *Taking the Name of LORD or GOD in vain* should be so generally esteem'd, and that even by (otherwise) Good or Religious Persons, either *No* Offence at all, or else a *Very Small* Offence. For Charity obliges me to think, that such Persons could never at first have

fallen into, much less have continu'd in such a Practice, (Habitual Practice, had not this Notion obtain'd among them.

To undeceive you therefore, and others into whose Hands this Paper shall come, (it being *Publish'd*, in order to be Serviceable, to put a stop to so Universal or *Publick* a Sin,) let it be consider'd,

1. How very frequent this Lesson is taught us in Scripture, that GOD's Name is *Holy*; particularly *Psalm* 111. 9. *Holy and Reverend is His Name.* His Name is *Holy*, i. e. Never to be us'd but on *Holy* or Religious Occasions: His Name is *Reverend*, i. e. never to be us'd, even on Holy Occasions, but with *Reverence.*

2. Let it be consider'd, that the contrary Practice is so very Offensive to GOD, as that he hath thought fit not only particularly and expressly to forbid it, but to make this Prohibition a distinct Command of the Decalogue. And it is Remarkable, that to prevent our being mistaken in the Meaning of the said Command, as to the Point before us, *Taking of GOD's Name in vain* is not barely imply'd under *Swearing in vain*, as a lesser Sin under a greater, (tho' this be done in other Commands of the Decalogue) but *Taking GOD's Name in vain* is the Sin expressly forbid in the Third Command, and *Swearing in vain*, &c. comprehended under it, as being one sort of *Taking GOD's Name in vain.*

3. Let it be consider'd, that *Not Taking the Name of GOD in vain*, is not only made an express and distinct Command of the Decalogue, but this Command is also peculiarly enforc'd with a severe Threat expressly denounc'd against such as should transgress it: *For the LORD will not hold him Guilt-*

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life that taketh his Name in vain: Where the Expreſſion, *The LORD will not hold him guiltleſs*, denotes, that GOD will not eaſily forgive this Sin, as only on a General Repentance, or upon our daily begging Pardon for our Sins in general; but will require a *Special* and *More than Ordinary* or *Daily Repentance* for the ſame, as being a Sin of an High Nature.

4. Let it be conſider'd, that the Command for *Not taking his name*, or which is the ſame, for *Hallowing the Name of GOD*, is in the Decalogue ſet before the Command for *Hallowing the Sabbath*. If therefore *Not hallowing the Sabbath* be a High Offence, a Great Sin; then *Not hallowing the Name of GOD* muſt be ſo likewiſe, as being requir'd before the other. And I therefore take notice of this, becauſe ſome Rigidly Scrupulous as to the *Hallowing of the Sabbath day*, are far from being Scrupulous of *Taking GOD's Name in vain*.

5. Let it be conſider'd, that the Duty of the Third Commandment is of ſo High an Importance in the Sight of GOD; and conſequently the Tranſgreſſion of it, a Sin of ſo High a Degree, that our Bleſſed Saviour judg'd it in a ſpecial manner neceſſary to ſet his Followers right, as to the True Intent of the ſaid Commandment. And therefore has given us in his Divine Sermon (*Mat.* 5. 33, 37.) an Expoſition of this Commandment in particular. Wherein he informs us (agreeably to what I have above obſerv'd in the 2d Conſideration) that by the ſaid Commandment We are not only forbid to *Swear at all* in vain, or in Common Converſation; but are alſo enjoyn'd to *let our Communication be yea, yea, nay, nay*; i. e. Plain Affirmations or Negations, enforc'd (if need be) by being repeated: *For whatſoever is more than theſe*, and conſequently

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the bare mention of the Name of GOD or LORD, *cometh of Evil*; or as the last Words should rather be rendered, *Comes of the Evil One*, i. e. of the *Devil*, that Grand Enemy to the Honour and Glory of GOD.

6thly and lastly, Let it be consider'd, that in that most Excellent and Comprehensive Form of Prayer, which our Blessed Saviour has left us for our Daily Use, the very first Petition is this, *Hallowed be thy Name*. Whereby is plainly denoted, that the *Hallowing the Name of God* is a Duty of the *First Rank*; and consequently the *Not hallowing*, or *Taking in vain, the Name of God*, must be a Sin of the *First Rank*.

The foregoing Consideration'd Considerations are, Sir, I think abundantly sufficient to Convince you, and any other, that the bare *Taking the Name of* GOD or *LORD in vain*, is no small, but a very great Sin; an Act highly Offensive to Almighty GOD: And therefore that it is not without just Cause that I thus Admonish you of the Infinite Danger, and most Dreadful Misery you are expos'd to, by being Guilty of Committing, Habitually Committing this Great Sin; until you have obtain'd GOD's Pardon for it, by a Special, Solemn, and Practical Repentance; so as not only to be heartily sorry for what is past, but truly to renounce and forsake the said Sin for the future.

To make you further sensible, what Need there is of a Special and Severe Repentance for what is past, be pleas'd to recollect; how *very often* you may have thus highly offended GOD by this Sin. Upon my own Observation I must tell you, that you have *within half an Hour* taken the Name of GOD or LORD in vain *Three* or *Four* times, to speak

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the least. And 'tis likely that you have us'd the same sinful Freedom elsewhere, and at other times, as oft as when I made the Observation; there being nothing, which could tempt you to the said Sin, at *that* time, any more than at *any other*. Now according to this Proportion consider, how *often* you have probably offended GOD in so high a manner *every Day*, especially when you have been engag'd in Company. And then consider further, how *long*, how *many Years* you have been guilty of using this sinful Freedom. From these two last Considerations put together, you may in the gross make a pretty good Guess at the *Number* of Times, that you have provok'd GOD by this sinful Freedom; and as you'll find the *Number* to be very Great, so it will be but reasonable, that your Repentance should bear a due Proportion, not only to the *Magnitude of the Sin in itself*, but also to the *Multitude of Times you have committed* it.

Again, consider with your self, how *Many* by your Example may have been induc'd to use the same Freedom, as judging it not sinful, because they have heard you use it, whom they knew to be a Religious Person. And this Consideration (not only of having offended GOD your self by this Sin, but also) of having given ill Example to others, and thereby either lead them into, or encourag'd them in, the Commission of this Sin, will carry in it a new and weighty Motive for enhauncing the Degrees of your Repentance, as to what is past.

As to the future, you must not only your self keep a particular and strict Guard over your Words; and hereto join your hearty and frequent Prayers, and devout and frequent receiving of the Lord's Supper, for obtaining GOD's special Grace, or the more than

than ordinary Assistance of the Holy Spirit, to enable you to cast off this sinful Habit, and quite to forsake the Practice of this Sin; you must (I say) not only do this *your own self*, but it will be also very requisite and beneficial for you, to desire *your Friends*, with whom you are wont to keep Company most, that they would be so *truly your Friends*, as to watch you likewise in your Discourse, and to give you faithful Notice, if ever they hear you use the same sinful Freedom; and also that they would Pray to GOD for you in a special manner, as to the Case before us.

And as by Your Example you have likely been the Unhappy Occasion, either of leading others into, or else confirming them in, the use of this sinful Freedom; so you must for the future be *More than ordinary Zealous* to Promote the Honour of GOD, by endeavouring to reclaim such as you find guilty of Dishonouring GOD by the like sinful Freedom; and if your own Prudence does not suggest to you a better way, you may in order thereto communicate to them this Paper at least.

I can't think you can be so weak, as to seek for any shelter from that *Common*, but in reality *No* Excuse, *viz.* that when you take the Name of GOD or LORD in vain, you do it *Unawares* or *Unknown to your self*. For this is an Excuse, that may be alledg'd by the Common Swearer, as well as by you; and therefore to be sure, carries nothing of Weight in it. Indeed it is so far from lessening, that it aggravates the Crime to an High Degree; it being certain, that a Person must be arriv'd to an *Habitual* Practice of a Sin, before He can be guilty of Committing it *Unawares* or *Unknown to himself*. Nor is it any better Excuse, for any one to urge, that he fell into this sinful Freedom *he knows not how*,

how, in his *younger days*, and by *hearing it so familiarly us'd in almost all Conversation*. For if this be a valid Excuse for a Christian, that takes GOD's Name in vain, it will also be as good an Excuse, if not much better, for a poor Idolatrous Heathen: Whereas St. *Paul* assures us, that such Heathen, in respect of their Idolatry, notwithstanding the common Usage of the Countries wherein they were Born and Bred, are *without Excuse*, *Rom.* 1. 20. And in like manner, whosoever, amongst us Christians, is guilty of taking the Name of God in vain, is in reality *without Excuse* in the Sight of GOD, notwithstanding the common Practice of this Sin among Persons of all Ranks and Orders; forasmuch as GOD has so plainly reveal'd to us our Duty in this respect. Indeed hereupon I can't forbear observing again, that it is an amazing Consideration, a most wonderful Artifice of the Devil, so to bring things about, that Persons otherwise Religious, and who particularly abhor *Swearing* and *Cursing*, &c. and actually abstain from them, should yet fall into, and live in, the sinful Freedom *of taking the Name of GOD* or *LORD in vain*; notwithstanding they have the contrary Duty so frequently inculcated in the Scriptures, have the *Ten Commandments* in particular read to them at least once every Week, and both hear and say themselves the *LORD's Prayer* several times every Day.

I might here put an end to this Letter, with regard, Sir, to you for whose sake it was Principally wrote. But it may be useful in respect of Others to observe further, that by *Taking GOD's Name in vain* is to be understood, not only saying in Common Discourse and without Need these Words, *O God*, *O Lord*, *O Jesu*, *O Christ*, *Good God*, *Good Lord*, or the like; but also using these Expressions,

Expressions, *God bless you, God help you, God love you, God or Christ bless your Soul.* and the like. For tho' these Expressions are Good in themselves, yet they are not to be us'd but in a Religious Manner. They are so many *short Prayers*, and therefore are to be us'd Reverently and Devoutly, and upon proper and serious Occasions: Whenever they are Not *so us'd*, they are *Abused* after a sinful manner. To cry, *God bless you, do this* or *that silly* or perhaps wicked thing; what is it but to *Take GOD's Name in Vain*, and to affront him in an high Degree. In a word, as to pray to GOD for a Blessing on another in a Serious and Reverend manner, is a Great Act of Piety; so to cry, *God bless you*, (or the like) in a laughing, jesting, or otherwise irreverent manner, is a *Great Act of Impiety*.

It will also be useful to observe, that not only using these Expressions, *By God, By Jesu, By Christ, By the Lord*, &c. is Swearing, but also to say, *GOD knows*. For what is this but to *Appeal to the Knowledge of GOD* for the Truth of what we say. And therefore, if what we are speaking of, be only a Trifle, a Matter of no such Importance, as requires such an Appeal to the Knowledge of GOD, then to cry, *GOD knows*, is not only to *Take GOD's Name in vain*, but to *Swear in vain*. And I take notice of this, because I have observ'd some, not only to profess an Abhorrence of Common or Vain Swearing, but actually to abstain from what they take to be so; and yet to make no scruple of using familiarly, and upon any trifling occasion, this Expression, *GOD knows*. In the like manner, to say, *GOD*, or *LORD, I will do so* or *so*, or the like, is not barely *Taking GOD's Name in vain*, but *Swearing in vain*: For *GOD* or *LORD*, in such Expressions, implies as much as, *By GOD*, or *By the LORD*. And I think also, that the Expression, *GOD so*, most familiarly

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us'd by ſome, is in reality no other than *Swearing in vain*. For what elſe is 'GOD ſo, but a Contraction of, *By GOD is it ſo*, or *ſay ye ſo?*

And this puts me in mind of taking notice here of other contracted Forms of *Swearing*, that are us'd among us, as if there was no manner of Hurt or Evil in them. And ſuch are theſe, *'Od* or *Ad*, that is in ſhort, *By God*; *'Od's Bud* or *'s Bud*, that is ſhort, *By GOD's Blood*; *'Od's Wounds* or *'Swounds*, that is, *By God's Wounds*; *'Od's Life* or *'Slife*, that is, *By God's Life*; *'Od's Zookers* or *'Zookes*, that is, *By God's Succour*; *'Od's Semmes*, that is, *As God ſees me*; *'Od's Me*, that is, *As God is with me*, &c. Now theſe being no other than Oaths or Forms of Swearing thus contracted, the ſame Command, that enjoyns us not to uſe the Explicit Forms, or the Words at length, does alſo by conſequence require us not to uſe the Contracted Forms, or the Words ſhortned; foraſmuch as the Words are of the ſame Importance in both Caſes. And therefore ſuch as uſe any of the ſaid Contracted Forms, (I need not add *in Common Diſcourſe*, becauſe they are never us'd otherwiſe) may juſtly be look'd upon, and ought to look on themſelves, as guilty of *Swearing in vain*. And the like is to be ſaid concerning ſuch as uſe the Expreſſion, *O Lo*, ſhortned from *O Lord*; for hereby they do in reality *take the Name of the LORD in vain*.

I ſhall conclude with obſerving, that the Sins of *Taking the Name of GOD in vain*, as alſo of *Swearing in vain*, have ſome Aggravations *Peculiar to them*, above other Sins; foraſmuch as there is no Temptation to theſe Sins, ariſing either from any Gratification they yield to any one of our Senſes *within* us, or from any Beauty or Force which they add *without* to any thing that is ſaid by *us*, and which

which at least might not be ...
Profession.) So that to Swear in vain by the ...
Name of GOD or LORD in vain, is to Swear ...
for sinning sake; and so those are Sins more ...
liarly of a Devilish Nature, and therefore are ...
said by Truth itself, Our Blessed Redeemer, ...
Sins that in a more Immediate manner come of ...
Evil One, i. e. the Devil.

If this Letter shall (as it ought) become ... mental in convincing you, Sir, and others ... Read it, of the great Heinousness of these Sins, ... so bring you duly to *Fear this Glorious and Fearful Name, the* LORD *thy* GOD, (Deut. 28. ... shall fully attain my End in Penning it, and ... way of Return shall only desire a Place in ... Prayers.

April 10th, 1710.

Your Most Affectionate and

Faithful Servant in Christ,

Edward We...

FINIS.